

The C.M.S. On The Banks Of The Niger: The Aboh/ Onitsha Story 1841-1937

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Abstract

Aboh was the first Igbo-speaking town to encounter Christianity in the nineteenth century during the Niger expeditions of 1841, 1854 and 1857. It is on record that Aboh was the transit camp of the C.M.S. missionaries who accompanied these expeditions. One would have expected Aboh to be the headquarters of the C.M.S. Niger Igbo Mission when in 1857, the leadership of the mission finally decided to establish a permanent station along the Niger. But this was painfully not so. The leadership of the mission relocated from Aboh in 1857 and thus abandoned it for Onitsha. Notable church historians attribute this relocation and subsequent abandonment to the misconduct of Obi Aje, whom they said refused the gospel on behalf of his people as he was the reigning monarch in Aboh around 1857. However, the present researcher has been able to establish some factors, notably economic and geographical that informed the decision of the leadership of the C.M.S. Niger Igbo mission to relocate from Aboh to Onitsha.

Introduction

Aboh would have been the cradle of Anglicanism and western civilization in Igboland had the C.M.S. Niger Igbo mission succeeded in establishing Christianity at Aboh in the middle of nineteenth century. Howbeit, Aboh remains the first Igbo-speaking town to encounter the missionaries in Nigeria during the Niger expeditions of 1841, 1854 and 1857. According to Ayika and Ekebuisi (2010):

The first expatriate missionary to step on Igbo soil was James Fredrick Schon, a German based in Freetown, Sierra-Leone. He was the leader of an evangelistic team sent out by the C.M.S. to accompany the commercial expedition from Great Britain to the Niger. The first Igbo town the expedition visited was Aboh. (pp. 319-320).

It is on record that Aboh was the ‘transit camp’ of the C.M.S. Niger Igbo mission until 1857 when, due to strange and inexplicable circumstances, the leadership of the C.M.S. Niger Igbo mission relocated from Aboh and thus abandoned it for Onitsha. Notable, church historians in Nigeria are almost in agreement that the abandonment of Aboh was primarily due to the misconduct of Obi Aje of Aboh who was the reigning monarch around 1857. Thus, Aboh, even in contemporary estimate continues to be regarded as a place that refused the gospel and Christianity. However, it seems to us that this

estimate was over blown in view of unexamined circumstances. It is therefore our view that the missionaries gave up too early on Aboh people as the reasons advanced for the abandonment of Aboh did not consider other obvious reasons. Therefore there was probably the ‘untold story’ of the C.M.S. missionary efforts at Aboh during the period under review. This obviously makes it imperative for a more analytical investigation of the history of the C.M.S. missionary activities in Aboh during the period under review.

The geographical area described as the banks of the Niger is limited to the area of Anglican missionary activities within the political entity formally known and described as Eastern Nigeria. It also covers the former Mid West, Bendel State or modern Delta State and some other parts of the western side of the River Niger. Our major focus in this research work is the Anglican Church as pioneered by Samuel Ajayi Crowther and extended by his successors in office.

By the 18th century, Christianity witnessed a wave of spiritual upheaval - the bubbling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men like John Wesley. Wesley for example challenged the established Anglican Church into action, generating a kind of evangelicalism that demanded a renewed zeal, revivalism and commitment on

the part of the individual Christian for a personal act of conversion. Consequently, enthusiastic and committed Christian groups constituted themselves into various missionary societies one of which was formed by the evangelical Anglicans in 1799 and called the church missionary society (C.M.S.).

Background history of Aboh

Aboh is an Igbo-speaking people who live essentially along the River Niger and its tributaries in Ndokwa East local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Aboh and a large group of western Igbo towns have traditions which claim that they were founded during a migration from Benin, led by Chima during the reign of the Oba Esigie. (C.1517 – C.1550). According to Ishichei (1977) “They came from a home land in Western Igboland, an area that had been conquered by an earlier expansionist Oba in the fifteenth century. Both Aboh and Onitsha tradition calls this homeland *Ado na idu*” (p. 51). Egharevba (1968) wrote that:

Early in Esigie’s reign there was a major crisis. Benin was invaded by an army from Idah, which Esigie successfully repulsed. The war with Idah was in turn one of a whole chain of political upheavals which established a great Nupe State, and broke the power of Oyo for almost a century. Perhaps the Idah war created disturbances in western Igboland from which a number of communities chose to flee. (p .14).

Tradition relates that Chima, in his migration, founded a number of western Igbo towns, which still preserve a sense of common identity as *Umuezechima*. Finally, the group reached the Niger, here, the group divided. One section crossed the Niger to found Onitsha, another section traveled south led by Esumeï founding a chain of western Igbo towns - Ossissa, Obetim, Ashaka, before finally reaching Aboh. Even more convincing is the use of another set of evidence as noted in Afigbo (1987) that:

The Obi of Aboh and his nobles impressed all visitors to their state in the 19th century, and probably still do, with their love of coral beads. Now it was asserted that this cultural predilection of the Aboh royalty proved that they were of the Benin origin. (p. 23).

Aboh was not founded in an unoccupied area. It was inhabited by the Akri Igbo. At first they co-existed peacefully, but after a time there was a dispute. The Akri people fled north to found Akri Ogidi and Akri Atani. The antiquity of the settlement of Aboh people on the Niger is reflected in the name given to them by other Igbo groups, ‘people of the Niger’, (*Ndoshimili*).

The first wave of missionary endeavours at Aboh

The first wave of missionary endeavours at Aboh was occasioned by series of expeditions in 1841, 1854 and 1857, across the Niger water ways.

The Niger expedition of 1841

The foundations of the Niger mission were laid in the expedition of 1841. The leaders of that expedition were commissioned by the British Government to negotiate with important local chiefs and make treaties for the abolition of the slave trade and to substitute it with friendly trade relation between her majesty's subjects and the natives of Africa. But the Government was not concerned with trade alone. According to Azubuike (2007):

In the instructions to the leaders of the expeditions, the Government enjoined them to tell the rulers of Africa that the Queen and the people of England profess the Christian religion and that in endeavouring to commerce and further trade relations with the African nations, her majesty's Government are actuated and guided by these principles. (p. 11).

In this and subsequent Niger expeditions, missionary, commerce and Government activities were closely linked. The three vessels, the Wilberforce, the Albert and the Sudan entered the Niger in August 1841. When the crew was made up, the C.M.S. sent J.F. Schon, a German missionary and an able linguist. The second person was a catechist and an ex-slave boy of Yoruba parentage, Samuel Ajayi Crowther. According to Azubike (2007) "during the ascent of the Niger, treaties for the abolition of the slave trade

were negotiated with the rulers of Aboh and Idah, who granted permission for the entry of missionaries” (p. 13). Anyabuiké (1996) also noted that “J. F. Schon conducted an interview with King Obi Ossai at Aboh and the Igbo rulers of Aboh showed much enthusiasm” (p. 23).

On arrival at the King’s house, the missionaries explained the purpose of their mission and preached the gospel message. To this, Dike (1996) noted that “the interview with Obi Ossai of Aboh conducted by J.F. Schon demonstrates the warm reception accorded the Christian message by some of the Ibo rulers” (p. 300). At the end, they presented Obi Ossai with two Bibles, one in English and the other in Arabic. The Obi could neither read nor write but the missionaries were accompanied by one Simon Jonas, an Igbo ex-slave from Sierra-Leone who acted as interpreter. The gentleman read the Sermon on the Mount to the King. On this, Ekechi (1972) submitted that “it was indeed at Obi’s insistence that Simon Jonas was left at Aboh and expounded the mysteries of the written word, while the rest of the expedition proceeded to Idah” (p. 8). But when forty five of the one hundred and fifty European members of the expedition died after two months of operation, the expedition was abandoned and the party returned via Aboh and took Simon Jonas on board and left for Nun and Fernando Po. A local church

narrative credit to B.P. Apena, cited in Okolugbo (1984), attests that “Jonas left Aboh with a heavy heart at his withdrawal from Aboh by the expedition team” (p. 12). So the C.M.S. Niger Igbo Mission has no list of Aboh Christian converts to show for its early visit in 1841.

However, in spite of the immediate failure of Buxton’s project, the expedition had set in motion a number of events which its failure could not hold back. One of these was the effect it had on British Policy. According to Ajayi (1965):

Prior to 1841, the British Government was averse to getting involved in West African local politics, but from that year, it began to encourage the signing of slave trade treaties to strengthen the hands of its naval officers by securing for them the support of friendly African chiefs on the mainland. (p 130).

British merchants and Christian missionaries took advantage of this move to rely more heavily on the effective protection from the anti-slavery squadron.

The 1854 Niger expedition

Macgregor Laird, in 1854, initiated a second expedition up the Niger for commercial and exploration purposes, and as the instruction of Christianity among the riverside tribes was an essential part of his project, Laird requested the C.M.S. to permit

S.A. Crowther and Simon Jonas to accompany the expedition, offering them free passage on his ship. Dike (1996) noted that in that expedition, “Crowther was remembered and welcomed at the places he had visited in 1841, especially at Aboh and Idah” (p. 303). Ferguson (1978) went on to say that “they duly reached Aboh but the old Obi was dead, and there was palaver over succession, they were, however, welcomed by the Obi’s son, Chukwuma” (p. 355). Okolugbo (1984) added that “Chukwuma wisely remarked that the late Obi prior to his death, had strictly charged them not to deviate from his policies and that they should preserve the friendship he had established with the white men” (p. 13). Then Crowther explained that one of the objects of their visit was to explore the feasibility of establishing a mission station at Aboh as they had done in Lagos, Badagry and Abeokuta. To this, according to Okolugbo (1984) “Chukwuma insisted that the difficulty was not with the Aboh people who were willing to be taught but with the white men who for many years had not fulfilled their promises. The party, like that of 1841, again stationed Simon Jonas at Aboh. Ferguson (1978) affirmed that:

The Obi of Aboh seized Simon’s hand, squeezed it most heartily, and said, you must stop with me, you must teach me and my people. The white people can go up the river without you; they may leave you here

until they return, or until other people come.
(p. 355).

The party went on the Benue River, leaving Jonas at Aboh. They returned after three months through Idah to Onitsha and Aboh were they picked Jonas. It was discovered that Jonas had done good introductory work and secured the friendship of the people who were anxious to retain him. The Aboh chiefs offered a site for a mission station and it was definitely marked off. A mango tree, known as Crowther's mango, was planted to mark the occasion. However, when Crowther discovered that the topography of Aboh was not the best for the kind of mission he intended to establish, he turned his attention to Onitsha.

The voyage of the Dayspring, 1857

The achievement of the 1854 expedition inspired further exploration of the hinterland. Laird was able to establish a factory at Aboh in 1856. A joint expedition by the British Government and Macgregor Laird was embarked on in the ship, the Dayspring, with W.B Baikie as commander. Crowther accompanied the expedition with a band of African workers to be stationed along the river. His helper was an African clergyman, J.C. Taylor, a son of slave parents of the Igbo tribe, Simon Jonas and a few other catechists from Sierra-Leone accompanied the expedition, the purpose being the stationing of these workers at

Aboh and Idah, on the farm and elsewhere. However, the missionaries under the leadership of S.A. Crowther took a decision to leave Aboh and chose Onitsha as the base of the Niger mission. This decision has provoked a lot of questions as to the actual reason(s) that necessitated the relocation. It was thus, this very question that occasioned this research effort.

According to Ferguson (1978):

The missionaries returned in 1857, with the definite intention of founding a mission. The original plan was to station Simon Jonas at Aboh as before. But Tsukuma (Chukwuma) had been defeated in the succession and the young chief, Aye (Aje) was a man of harsh character and ill disposed toward the missionaries, so this plan was withdrawn and a more favourable site chosen at Onitsha. (p. 356).

Obiosa (2009) noted that “Obi Aje was not receptive to the missionaries as his father, Ossai, or brother, Chukwuma, had been in 1841 and 1854 respectively, he was rascally and greedy for undiluted rum at his visit to the missionaries on board in 1857 (p. 14).

Walker (1931) added that:

The Obi before his departure on board, tried to get Mr. Taylor’s shoes, wanted to carry off the cushion kindly placed at his back, made a clutch at the hand bell which was being rung to give notice that dinner was

ready, and generally displayed his cupidity all round, until to the relief of his hosts, he got into his canoe and paddled back home. (p .152).

According to Okolugbo (1984) “Crowther’s general disapproval of Obi Aje’s conduct (which eventually extended to all Aboh people) led to the abandonment of Aboh” (p. 15). Though Crowther secured land where on the new mission premises might be built, he made no further attempt to establish Christianity in that new mission site. Nevertheless, Walker (1931) still believed that:

The 1857 mission started with disappointment. Simon Jonas was to be stationed at Aboh to continue the work he had begun in 1841 and 1854, but the young chief, Aje, had deteriorated into an insolent and rapacious ruffian and it was manifestly wiser to try how things stood elsewhere. (p .153).

Onyeidu (2004) also thought that:

The people were insistent that a factory should be established at Asaba as well as at Onitsha, although the distance between the two places is scarcely three miles; they said they did not go to Aboh because Aje (King of Aboh) kidnapped them, and no assurance that Aje would not do so again. (p. 14).

However, it was Achunike (2002) who pointed out that “the expedition arrived as far as Aboh on the western coast of the Niger where they were well received by the Obi, the king, of course not perhaps without motives for material and commercial gains” (p. 43).

From the foregoing therefore, it is the view of the present researcher that the missionaries gave up too early on Aboh. The action of the missionaries negates the apostolic commission of taking the gospel “to the end of the earth”. The missionaries should not have abandoned Aboh as the salvation of souls remains paramount to any worthwhile missionary adventure. Even when we share the commercial sentiments of the expedition party, which partly influenced the missionary’s choice of location that led to the preference of Onitsha, as we shall soon point out, the missionaries should have left Simon Jonas to continue his evangelical work at Aboh. No thanks to the conduct of Obi Aje. However, there seems to be some questions yearning for honest answers as it is obvious that there were possible factors that could have contributed to the relocation of the missionaries from Aboh to Onitsha.

Possible reasons why the missionaries left Aboh

The reasons which influenced Crowther's choice of Onitsha as the headquarters of the Niger Igbo mission instead of Aboh were both economical and geographical, this is so because it is the believe of the present researcher that the alleged misconduct of Obi Aje does not suffice for the abandonment of a people who had displayed their willingness to receive the gospel. In spite of the alleged insolence of Aje, Walker (1931) confirmed that:

After many subsequent interviews with the grasping Aje, Crowther went to the headman of another part of the town and secured land where on the new mission premises might be built, however, Crowther never made any further attempt to develop the new site that was given out for the mission station. (p. 153).

This takes us to the first possible reason why the missionaries left Aboh.

Economic reasons

In discussing the economic influence on the Niger Mission, Thomas Fowell Buxton's idea must come to bare. Buxton believes that a new approach to the anti-slavery campaigns must be sought. His scheme was devised to involve the British Government, the humanitarians, interested businessmen and the

missionary societies in a cooperative endeavour. On this, Okeke (2006) stated that:

They were to explore the possibilities for economic expansion along the Niger Basin. Concomitant with the expected gains, implicit in such a venture, there was aim to call forth the best in men from the proposed areas of exploration. They would act for the European merchants, while supported and protected by the British Government. (p. 4-5).

In the same direction, Crampton (2004) noted that “Crowther worked hand in hand with commerce. In fact his opponents complained that he was too interested in trade, his African missionaries were very much akin to traders and depended on them for their passages and supplies” (p. 20).

Crowther’s disaffection with Aje seemed to be the very much echoed reason for the missionaries’ abandonment of Aboh, however, it seem that it was Baikie’s choice which determined the choice of Onitsha. The man who was to handle the Igbo mission was Taylor. He and his Igbo associates considered that the best way to reach their kith and kin in the Igbo heartland was through Baikie’s choice. And Taylor, from the start, found favour with Baikie. Whatever, therefore, was Crowther’s view concerning Aboh could not have influenced the choice of station.

Baikie's choice was both important and decisive, as pointed out in Okeke (2006) thus:

Baikie's decision was apparently motivated by the attempts of the Manchester establishment to break up the monopoly of the Delta Chiefs and their supercargo friends. Aboh was part of the monopoly to which goods and men from the interior Igbo were sent. (p. 27).

Northrup, (cited in Okeke 2006) throws considerable light on the trade links in Igboland prior to the increase in commercial involvement of Europe. One of the main centres of commerce which he examined was Aboh. Through it the greater part of Igboland was linked with Benin and the Delta states. If therefore, the free trade to which the C.M.S., the Manchester firms and Henry Venn were committed was to become a reality, an alternative commercial centre was to be found. The present researcher is poised to believe with Northrup that Baikie was out to fashion out an alternative commercial centre to break the monopoly of the Delta Chiefs. The 1854 expedition of Baikie satisfied his quest for this alternative. Onitsha, rather than Aboh, answered the needs of the new entrepreneur. Onitsha is strategic. It connects Igboland east and west of the river Niger. It links Igala and Asaba, and through it the former and Aboh are linked. In this regard, Okeke (2006) has this to say:

Onitsha was linked with hinterland Igbo towns. A number of towns were attending Onitsha market long before the arrival of Europeans. From the local markets situated either in the villages, or zones, the main commercial centres attracted goods. The zonal market centres included among others Osamari, Awka, Aguleri, Nteje, Uburu, Bende. (p. 30).

Onitsha market, therefore, provided an internal trade organization and communication, which were to be useful for the expansion of Christianity in Igboland. Also stressing on the commercial importance of Onitsha as a major factor that gave Onitsha prominence in the scheme of the missionaries, Ekechi (1972) noted that:

From the commercial and strategic point of view, both Baikie and Crowther considered Onitsha a better location than Aboh. With Onitsha a better location as centre, it was thought, the resources of the interior districts could be much more easily exploited, as Onitsha appeared to afford better communication facilities with the regions in the north and with other Igbo districts. In the opinion of Baikie, therefore, Onitsha was the best gateway to all the towns in Igboland. (p. 8).

For this reason, Crowther had to instruct Taylor that the first and most important place to which your attention should be chiefly

directed is Onitsha which appears to be the high road to the heart of Igbo nation.

Meanwhile, Aje, the King of Aboh, and some of the resident traders at Aboh, at that time, were generally at odds with each other. He complained some years earlier that some of the merchants had refused to pay for the land on which the factory was built as was previously agreed, and also that some of the factories owed his brother Chukwuma large sums of money, many of them of long standing. It is safe, therefore, to assume that Crowther, on his part, was only suspicious of Aje. His decision to establish his first mission station at Onitsha was, in part, an effort to avoid an unforeseen conflict with Aje, not necessary that Aje was hostile to the missionaries as perceived by some historians.

Salisbury square appeared to have been satisfied with the choice of Onitsha as headquarter and Taylor as leader. Hence Anyabuiké (1996) noted that “since Onitsha is strategic for its location, unlike Aboh, it enjoyed the approval of Crowther, Laird, and even Baikie as commercial as well as missionary centre” (p. 25). In appreciation, Baikie wrote on Onitsha that it is well placed on rising ground with a dry soil; it is the key to the

extensive Igbo district and it is the proper spot for a trading nucleus.

This leads us to the second possible reason why Onitsha was preferred to Aboh in the scheme of the nineteenth century missionaries.

Geographical reasons

The topography and the general physical features of Aboh town also constituted a definite hindrance to the type of European mission that Crowther was attempting to establish on the Niger. Obiosa (2009) is of the view that “the topography of Aboh resulting in seasonal sea inundation and the health hazard it posed in the mind of Crowther was a setback” (p. 14). During the 1854 expedition he observed great floods and concluded that the place was unhealthy for his mission. On this Ferguson noted that “Crowther saw that Aboh, with its flooded and unhealthy streets, was not the best to start; he moved cautiously promising no more than to send resident teachers as soon as possible” (p. 356). Sad enough, Crowther never fulfilled his promise and no church teacher was sent to Aboh under Crowther’s arrangement. The reception accorded him might have moved him to promise the Aboh people the services of a teacher or two and the opening of a mission station. But when he compared the swampy and marshy town of Aboh with the town of Onitsha on a higher

altitude he turned his attention to the later. It is in this same regard that Basden (1983) opined that:

Near Aboh the waters of the Delta assumes an aspect worthy of its title, the “Lordly Niger”. At the close of the wet season the rain cease, however, it subsides at a remarkably rapid rate, and very soon sand banks appear, and navigation becomes an intricate business. (p .25).

In his attempt at relating the flooded area of Aboh and what may seem to be a more favourable topography of Onitsha, Basden (1983) submitted that “a day’s run from Aboh brings the traveler to Onitsha, in the neighbourhood of which are seen the first sign of hilly country, a welcome relief from the depressing low levels hitherto encountered” (p. 26).

Ekechi (1971) added that:

Apart from the fact that Onitsha was relatively drier than Aboh and free from the constant river inundations which beset Aboh, the realization that Onitsha was virtually the demarcation line between Muslim influences to the north and pagans to the South, strongly influenced Crowther’s ultimate decision to have Onitsha as the centre of the Niger mission. (p. 8).

Though recognizing that Idah and Igbede could equally well be used as centres for reaching the large heathen population in the

north, Crowther insisted that any attempt to make a bold thrust into the Mohammedan areas would prove futile.

For these and some other possible reasons, Okolugbo (1984) concluded that:

The missionaries found Onitsha more promising. It was a big city, located two or three miles from the river and being about one hundred feet above sea level, was in no danger of such inundation as Crowther observed at Aboh on his previous visit. (p. 38).

J.C. Taylor, Simon Jonas, and three sierra-Leone Christians were stationed at Onitsha to make the town their permanent home. Crowther left the Niger by an overland route to Yoruba country after the wreckage of the Dayspring near Jebba, and when he revisited the Niger stations in 1859, he by-passed Aboh. And that was the end of the first wave of missionary activities at Aboh in the nineteenth century. Other stations were later established at Osomari, Oko, and Asaba (1874) all south of Onitsha; but nothing was heard about Aboh. Thus, Aboh which first embraced Christianity in Igboland remained in the nineteenth century in “darkness” until the third decade of the twentieth century. These, as well as the dilatory attitude of the missionaries explained why Aboh did not benefit more from the spread of Christianity in the nineteenth century.

The second wave of missionary activities in Aboh

The second wave of Christian missionary activities in Aboh started about seventy-five years after the first that ended in 1857. It took the passionate letter of Obi Oputa II of Aboh to the Diocese on the Niger in the early 1930, before the attempt at reviving C.M.S. missionary work at Aboh. According to Okolugbo (1984), the Obi had in his letter “claimed that since the C.M.S. missionaries were the first people to establish a mission station at Aboh, the people preferred the Anglican Church to any other mission” (p. 32). Hence, in 1932, there was a move by the Onitsha Diocesan board to revive missionary activities in Aboh. The board was so moved by Obi’s letter that Bishop Lasbery sent a delegation of clergymen (V. Umunna, Nwajei, and Ibeneme) to visit Aboh and interview Obi Oputa II. The delegation took a catechist, named Ofuma, and after interviewing the Obi, they left the catechist to start missionary operation at Aboh according to the obi’s request. However, the Obi was not satisfied with the missionary method of the Niger mission, which tended to withdraw catechist Ofuma for a period of five months every year, because of the flood that threatens the town during the wet season. So the Obi cleverly sent out catechist Ofuma from Aboh to Ashaka, saying that Ashaka was still under his domain. Ofuma opened St. Paul’s Anglican Church Ashaka which was placed under O.N. Garrard, the superintendence of Isoko district.

The missionary effort that is thriving in Aboh today, dates back only to 1937. It was championed by a retired C.M.S. agent and zealous evangelist named Paul Jector Ossai. According to Okolugbo (1984), “in 1937, Paul Jector Ossai, went to catechist Apena at Ugheli, claiming that he had a call to establish missionary centres in Aboh area and requesting Apena to dedicate him prayerfully to God for the mission” (p. 33). The catechist did as he requested and he began entirely on his own. He took as his attendants, Francis Nwaguzo and Paul Ojogu in his new evangelistic campaign. They took the gospel from Aboh to Ase, Umuolu, Ndoni, Aballa, and of course the entire Ndoshimili land. It is interesting to note that Aboh, which hitherto was viewed as a place that rejected Christianity was said to have been largely evangelized in less than three years. That which discouraged Crowther and his team only inspired Paul Jector Ossai and his band of local evangelists.

Conclusion

The missionaries’ decision to abandon Aboh in the nineteenth century was unfortunate. They were unfair in the extension of their dissatisfaction with Obi Aje’s conduct to the entire Aboh people. Aboh is not the only Ndoshimili Community in the area. The missionaries could have shifted base to any of the other

communities nearby if the misconduct of Obi Aje, as some historians claimed was their reason for the abandonment of Aboh. This practice was the policy of the missionaries in other places. For instance, when Onitsha was shelled following the looting of the British Company in 1879, the missionaries did not abandon Onitsha. They only relocated their headquarters temporarily to Asaba. They later on returned to Onitsha. The experience was the same during the period of the Ekumeku war in the late 1890s. One would have thought that since the missionaries claimed that they had their problem mainly with Obi Aje, they would have returned after his death to resume their evangelical work. The C.M.S. missionaries of the Niger Igbo mission left Aboh leaving little or no trace of their missionary efforts, no church building, no school, no hospital, and more worrisome, no converts. The early missionaries did not realize their goal of establishing a credible mission station and school at Aboh. They made no attempts to return to Aboh. This made the active involvement of local indigenous evangelists inevitable in the evangelization of the area in the twentieth century.

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